

To Members and Associates of the Society for Psychical Research.

CIRCULAR No. 1.

(SECOND EDITION).

ON THE GENERAL WORK OF THE SOCIETY.

14, DEAN'S YARD, WESTMINSTER, S.W.,

December, 1883.

The Council of the S.P.R. have from time to time received letters from Members and Associates, inquiring in what practical manner they could best further the Society's objects.

The Council on their part warmly welcome such offers of assistance. They feel that the task which the Society has before it is a long and arduous one, and can only be achieved by the co-operation of many labourers. It is, moreover, desirable that these labourers should be widely distributed over this and other countries, in order that each may act as a centre for the collection of information, for the formation of local committees, or at any rate for the dissemination of a spirit of serious inquiry. It has been thought, therefore, that an account, somewhat more detailed than has been already published, of the lines of work which seem to offer the best chance of useful results, may with advantage be circulated among all our members. Their active help in research is more important even than their pecuniary support.

The research-work of the Society is at present divided between six Committees, elected by the Council from among the Members and Associates. The following are the names and addresses of the respective secretaries :—

1. *Committee on Thought-transference.*
PROFESSOR BARRETT, 6, De Vesci Terrace, Kingstown, Co. Dublin.
2. *Committee on Mesmerism.*
MR. F. PODMORE, 16, Southampton Street, Fitzroy Square, W.
3. *Committee on Reichenbach's and similar experiments.*
MR. W. H. COFFIN, 94, Cornwall Gardens, South Kensington, S.W.
4. *Committee on Physical Phenomena.*
MR. FRANK SEPTIMUS HUGHES, 1, Clifford's Inn, London, E.C.

5. *Committee on Haunted Houses.*

MR. EDWARD R. PEASE, 17, Osnaburgh Street, Regent's Park, N.W.

6. *Literary Committee (for the collection examination, and presentation of evidence).*

MR. EDMUND GURNEY, 26, Montpelier Square, S.W.

MR. F. W. H. MYERS, Leckhampton House, Cambridge.

Taking these Committees in order, let us consider how the work of each may be most effectively furthered.

(1) Thought-reading—or, as we should prefer to call it, *thought-transference*,—is the branch of our research in which hitherto most progress has been made. This is right and natural; till this comparatively simple class of facts shall have been widely and intelligently recognised, our labours in other directions must fail of their full effect. And we think that there ought to be little difficulty in rapidly rendering our investigation on this side so complete as to leave no further room for objections, however trivial or unfair. But this rapid progress depends on the amount of collaboration that we receive. There is yet much to be done before our evidence can present itself to the eyes of a world, consisting not wholly of philosophical and dispassionate persons, as a sufficient foundation for the structure which we desire to raise upon it.

We fully allow that for this end the conditions of the experiments have not as yet been sufficiently varied—the trials having been conducted, for the most part, by one set of experimenters, and with but a few subjects. It may fairly be argued that if this faculty of thought-transference is found in some persons in a high state of perfection, it should be present in a rudimentary state in many more: this hypothesis has so far been most insufficiently tested. We have to allow, moreover, that we are as yet only less ignorant than the rest of the world as to the conditions under which these phenomena occur, and their relations to other natural facts. Thus we neither know what circumstances favour the receptivity of the recipient, nor how best to arrange the number, or to direct and concentrate the impressional energy, of the experimenters; nor have we any certain induction as to the effect of greater or less distances or of obstacles interposed between the experimenter and the "subject." Again, while our experiments so far seem to prove that the transferred impression is sometimes of a visual, sometimes of an auditory kind, sometimes, again, of the nature of suppressed speech, we are ignorant of the relative frequency of these several modes, and of the conditions which favour any one of them rather than the others; whether, for instance, the explanation of such differences is to be sought rather in the peculiarity of the subject, or in the special manner in which the attention of the experimenters is concentrated. Once more, in our

experiments on the mental transference of rude drawings, which could not be expressed in words, the visual impression in the recipient's mind has sometimes been laterally inverted, and in the complementary colour of the original,—black lines on a white ground appearing as white lines on a dark ground,—obviously fuller information on these points is most important. What is needed, then, is a large number of experiments similar to those already published, but conducted by different groups of persons and under different conditions. We have reason to believe that the percipient faculty, so far from being abnormal or infrequent, is pretty generally diffused; and if this fact is gradually made good among persons of recognised position and intelligence, attempts to explain the results by trickery and collusion will become increasingly ridiculous. Only thus, moreover, can we obtain sufficient material upon which to base generalisations.

The experiments required are neither difficult nor costly; they involve no great expenditure of time, nor do they demand any other qualities than patience and accuracy. Even where they fail, the time spent upon them will not have been wasted; for where the aim is not merely to demonstrate the existence of particular facts, but to ascertain the conditions of their occurrence, failure may be as instructive as success.

We shall be grateful, therefore, to all persons, whether members of our Society or others, who will undertake a series of experiments of the kind detailed below, and will forward the results to us. These results will be collated and summarised, and the whole or a portion of the evidence will be eventually published, together with any general conclusions and observations that may be suggested by it. We must specially urge, however, that those who are willing thus to co-operate with us will accurately record the results of *every* experiment made; we do not desire *selected* results.

Instead of sending the results of their investigation to the Committee, our friends may prefer to present a paper on the subject, in their own name, to the Council; such papers will be gladly received, and if passed by the Council will be read before the Society, and "referred" for publication in the Proceedings of the Society. We would further ask all intending coadjutors to communicate their names to the Hon. Secretary of the Thought-transference Committee. Forms, a specimen of which is sent herewith, for recording the results of the experiments, and coloured discs, &c., can be obtained on application to the Secretary of the Society, at 14, Dean's Yard, Westminster, S.W.

The objects recommended for experiment are (1) cards, (2) numbers, (3) words and names, (4) coloured discs, (5) geometrical figures, patterns, &c., (6) tunes.

If the experiment is made with cards the whole pack should be used, and not a selected portion of it. If with numbers, names, &c., the principle

on which the selection is made should be indicated (*e.g.*, that the number consists of two figures, or that the name is a Christian name), in order that some estimate may be formed of the chances against success. In no case should more than two trials be allowed; and when the number of objects to be selected from falls below ten, there should be no second trial. Absolute silence should be secured during the progress of the experiments. If the first trial is a failure, the percipient should learn that fact from the silence of the experimenter, or "agent," as we prefer to call him. It should further be stated what precautions, if any, have been taken to preclude the possibility of learning the object selected by ordinary means. There are reasons why experiments conducted by two persons only are specially valuable. Particular attention should be paid to the following points:— (1) the exact nature of the impression produced, and the relative sensibility of different persons to the visual and other sorts of impression; (2) the comparative success of the experiment with one "agent," and with many, and especially whether success seems to be promoted by the fact that the circle contains a member or members nearly connected by blood, or by any sympathetic bond, with the "subject"; (3) the connection between the experiments and the state of health of both agent and percipient; (4) the duration of the sensitive stage; (5) its capacity for improvement by exercise. Any other observations suggested by the experiments will, of course, be welcomed by the Committee. A specimen schedule is appended; × indicates quite right; 0 indicates that no impression was produced, and no guess made.

FORM No. I.

EXPERIMENTS ON THOUGHT-TRANSFERENCE.

AGENT :		PERCIPIENT :		AGENTS :		PERCIPIENT :	
<i>John Smith</i>		<i>Robert Jones</i>		<i>John Roberts, Mary Roberts, Henry Owen.</i>		<i>Ada Roberts.</i>	
Date.	Object selected. (e.g., a card.)	First trial.	Second trial.	Date.	Object selected. (e.g., a name.)	First trial.	Second trial.
<i>Mar. 1, 1882.</i>	<i>4 of diamonds</i>	×		<i>April 3, 1883.</i>			
	<i>2 of clubs</i>	<i>3 of clubs</i>	×				
	<i>Q. of spades</i>	<i>3 of spades</i>	<i>Q. of clubs</i>				
	<i>1 of hearts</i>	×					
	<i>3 of spades</i>	<i>Q. of spades</i>	×		<i>Hutchinson</i>	×	
	<i>8 of hearts</i>	<i>1 of hearts</i>	×		<i>Watkins</i>	<i>Wells</i>	×
	<i>5 of diamonds</i>	×			<i>Sefton</i>	<i>Skipton</i>	×
	<i>Kn. of hearts</i>	<i>Kn. of diamds.</i>	<i>K. of hearts</i>		<i>Orton</i>	×	
	<i>7 of clubs</i>	×			<i>Higgins</i>	<i>Hitchins</i>	×
	<i>6 of hearts</i>	<i>4 of hearts</i>	<i>9 of diamonds</i>	<i>Inman</i>	0	0	
	Total No. of experiments, <i>10.</i>	No. right on first trial, <i>4.</i>	No. right on second trial, <i>3.</i>		Total No. of experi- ments, <i>6.</i>	No. right on first trial, <i>2.</i>	No. right on second trial, <i>3.</i>

Observations :—In two out of the three experiments with cards which failed on both trials, the two guesses together include the correct designation of the card. In two of the three experiments with names, which were successful on the second trial, the name given on the first trial bore a distinct resemblance to the right one.

(2) The transition from thought-transference to the phenomena of so-called *mesmerism* is a gradual one. Many, at least, of the commonly reported mesmeric phenomena consist partly of some transmission of thought or sensation from the operator to the subject. We should be glad to hear of and to witness any such cases. We are anxious also for evidence as to the *curative* power of mesmerism; and if any of our members, resident in or near London, can suggest a case where mesmeric treatment seems likely to be of service, we shall be glad to consider whether we can provide such treatment, under the supervision of a duly qualified physician.

We are especially anxious to witness cases of what is termed *mesmeric lucidity*, or *clairvoyance*. The distinction between thought-transference (mesmeric or otherwise) and clairvoyance we take to be that in thought-transference the idea or image is flashed into the recipient's mind from some other mind in which it is already present, whereas the *clairvoyant* is said to discern at a distance inanimate objects, or persons whose thoughts are in no way directed towards him. Such clairvoyance is undoubtedly rare, but there is much evidence for its occasional occurrence. Experiments in these higher phenomena of mesmerism need to be conducted under careful supervision. There is reason, however, for confident belief that they can be safely carried on under experienced guidance; and the Committee earnestly request that early information may be sent to them of cases where these occurrences are observed.

(3) *The Reichenbach Committee*, who have recently achieved unexpectedly favourable results, will be glad to receive information as to any peculiar electric or magnetic effect observed in connection with special organisations; or as to any unexplained luminous appearances attaching to crystals, magnets, and the human form. The occurrence of natural somnambulism is a marked prognostic of sensitiveness of this kind; and the Committee will be glad to offer facilities for experiment, at their rooms in Dean's Yard, to any person in whom this symptom has shewn itself.

(4) *The Committee on Physical Phenomena*—of the kind commonly called spiritualistic. This is a subject which has been largely brought before the public through paid mediums. In such cases it is clear that there are strong temptations to fraud, and the Committee (some of whom have for many years attended specially to this particular point) are of opinion that results obtained where the medium is paid, and the investigators untrained, are generally worthless for scientific purposes. They desire to eliminate, at least one temptation to fraud, by sitting with private and unpaid mediums, and they earnestly request communications from private circles, giving an account of such phenomena (occurring spontaneously or otherwise), as lights, movements of objects, raps, voices, unexplained noises, and other cognate occurrences. It should be specified whether such phenomena came under the observation of more than one person, and if so, whether their

accounts were consistent. An exact description of the conditions of observation is also requested. The Secretaries of this Committee, or other members of it, would gladly assist, if so permitted, at the further verification of these reported phenomena. They can easily understand that private circles may be reluctant to admit any observers from without. But they would impress upon such circles the extreme importance of so doing, in order that the scattered phenomena may be brought to a focus, and set forth in a manner to command scientific attention.

Any account of personal experiments with the so-called "divining rod" will also be welcomed by this Committee.

(5) *The Committee on Haunted Houses* invite information on any unusual occurrences seemingly confined to particular localities, such as bell-ringing, unseen footsteps, &c. ; but, especially, apparitions of any kind. It should be specially noted whether these phenomena were observed at fixed periods or on certain days of the year. There are houses bearing this kind of reputation in most localities ; and it would be of real service if any member would take pains to sift the rumours current about such houses in his own neighbourhood, and, if possible, track them to their source. It may probably be often found that the reputation of being "haunted" is due to easily explicable sources of noise or disturbance, and it is eminently desirable that all such cases should be distinctly cleared up.

We shall gladly avail ourselves of any opportunity which our members may be able to procure for us of personally investigating occurrences of this nature. As the pecuniary value of a house is sometimes thought to be endangered by a reputation for being haunted, we may here repeat the statement which refers equally to communications received by all the Committees—viz., that all information will be regarded as confidential, when it is so desired.

(6) *The Literary Committee.* The communications hitherto invited have mainly been concerned with phenomena now occurring, or presumably capable of reproduction. But the Literary Committee are anxious to receive accounts of experiences, in the past as well as the present, of any kind at all cognate to those already enumerated. *Dreams*, premonitory, symbolic, or coincident either with other similar dreams or with the external fact dreamt of ; instances of so-called *second-sight* ; accounts of *apparitions* during life, at the moment of death, or after death ; or, on the other hand, of *spectral illusions* recognised as such by the subject of them ;—there is hardly any kind of abnormal phenomenon which, if exactly recorded and fully attested, may not add a valuable item to the vast collection of facts which must be garnered up before generalisations can be safely attempted.

The Committee are glad, also, to receive references to passages in books, in any language, where phenomena of this kind are incidentally recorded.

In many *biographies* some such incident occurs ; and a reference to such a story, with the title-page and date of the book distinctly given, will always be gratefully received. Information as to foreign researches on psychical subjects is also desired ; and as the Society is founding a library for the use of its members, any offers of books, either as gifts or for purchase, will be gladly considered.

It may be added, in conclusion, that any criticisms or suggestions with which readers of this paper may favour us, will be a welcome form of assistance.